

GEORGIA

I. Summary

Georgia remains a secondary transit route for narcotics flowing from Afghanistan, by way of Iran and across the Caspian. The potential for Georgia to become an important narcotics transit route in the future is heightened by the lack of control the government exercises over its borders and territory. Despite numerous efforts of reform and frequent personnel changes, law enforcement agencies remained overstaffed, under-equipped, poorly paid, and with a reputation as highly corrupt. The newly appointed Minister of Internal Affairs began his tenure at the ministry with a fierce anti-narcotics campaign, which has created hopes for positive change in the law enforcement system as well as for the entire country. Georgia is a party to the 1988 United Nations Drug Convention and is also receiving assistance from the UN Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODC).

II. Status of Country

Georgia is believed to be a secondary transit route for heroin smuggled from Afghanistan through Iran and then on to Europe. Afghan morphine and heroin base destined for Turkey is also presumed to transit Georgia. Given Georgia's geographic location and its ambition to be a key link in a future overland trade corridor between Europe and Asia there is a possibility it could also emerge as a major drug trafficking route. Narcotics trafficking routes through Georgia which have been identified are as follows: The east/west route with narcotics entering the country from Azerbaijan via the Caspian Sea (originating in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) to Baku, then they are shipped north via Russian land routes and then enter Georgia.

The main method of transit is TIR trucks that are not monitored in Azerbaijan or in Georgia, but rather theoretically inspected and sealed at their place of origin. TIR trucks move westward to Kyurdamir, then to Yevlakh and cross the border at Gardabani destined for Tbilisi. From Tbilisi the drugs are shipped west to the seaports of Poti, Batumi (Adjara) and Sukhumi (Abkhazia) on the Black Sea. From there the drugs are shipped mainly to Turkey (Istanbul), Romania (Constantia) and Ukraine (Odessa)—the south/north route through which narcotics from Iran cross into Azerbaijan at Astara or Bilasuvar in the south, or through the Nagorno-Karabakh province or via Armenia. Next the drugs are moved northwards to Russia via Baku, or alternatively are shipped westward towards Tbilisi. While involvement in drug trafficking by Georgian nationals remains limited, cigarettes, fuel, wheat and alcohol smuggling are major illegal activities in Georgia. Even though the function of detection of illegal smuggling on the borders was transferred from Customs to the newly established Operational Investigative Unit under the Ministry of Tax and Revenues, this movement did little to reduce drug trafficking and other smuggling.

III. Country actions against drugs in 2003

Policy Initiatives. Counter-narcotics efforts are coordinated under an inter-agency group chaired by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) with the Ministry of State Security (MSS) as deputy chair. The interagency group did not undertake any significant counter-narcotics policy initiatives in 2003, in large part due to the lead agencies focus on national security. In 2003, the UNODC and the European Union launched a third project under the South Caucasus Anti-Drug Program (SCAD) initiated in 2001. SCAD is mandated to assist in the areas of legal knowledge, seaport control and the land border control.

Law Enforcement Efforts. Drug seizures and arrests rose by a modest amount from 2002 to 2003. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that during the first half of 2003 the counter-narcotics unit of the ministry uncovered 4,183 drug-related cases; criminal proceedings were initiated in 1,813 of them, which is 50 cases more than the previous year, 2.8 kilograms of heroin was seized by the counter-narcotics unit, which is 1.2 kilograms more than previous year. In addition seven kilograms of opium and 25.6 kilograms of marijuana were discovered by the police during the same six months. In 2003 the MOIA began a serious campaign to reveal drug-users within the ministry and the Special Internal Investigative Department was established. This unit's creation led to the firing of 24 ministry employees during the reporting period. The National Anti-Narcotics Bureau has investigated 736 drug-related cases. Criminal proceedings were initiated in 304 of them, which is 117 cases more than last year.

First Six Months of:

	2003	2002
Seizure of heroin	2.8 kg	1.6kg
Seizure of marijuana	25,6kg	20,4kg
Seizure of opium	6,778kg	852gr
Seizure of hashish	9,3kg	11,2kg

Corruption. Corruption has been the most significant problem within Georgia's law enforcement agencies. Georgia's anti-corruption efforts continue to be hampered by the widespread tolerance of corruption within Georgian society. During 2001 the Government of Georgia formed a commission to reform the law enforcement agencies (so-called "power ministries"). The commission developed a strategy for reorganization that was forwarded to the Georgian National Security Council; however, no significant changes were made. In any case, none of these proposed measures can truly ameliorate the situation given the low wages of officials and poor standard of behavior from those in charge that nourish wide-scale, low level corruption. The new hope of eradicating corruption within the system emerged with the appointment of a new Minister of Internal Affairs, who has publicly and repeatedly announced his commitment to combating corruption and the trafficking of drugs.

Agreements and Treaties. The Government of Georgia has no counter-narcotics agreements with the United States. Georgia has been a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention since January 1998.

Cultivation and Production. Estimates by the Government of Georgia on the extent of narcotics cultivation within the country are unreliable and do not include those areas of the country outside

the central government's control (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). Given the small amount of low-grade cannabis grown mainly in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains, largely for domestic use, Georgia is not demonstrably a significant producer of narcotics. Approximately 31.6 tons of cannabis were destroyed during the special operation of the MOIA under the title Cannabis-2003. There is no other known narcotics crop or synthetic drug production in Georgia. Although Georgia has the technical potential to produce precursor chemicals, it has no known capacity for presently producing in significant quantities.

Drug Flow/Transit. The government has no reliable statistics on the volume of drugs transiting Georgia. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) has previously reported that 95 percent of illegal drugs that enter Georgia are for non-Georgian consumption. Prices for drugs in Georgia are currently estimated at the wholesale price of U.S. \$150-\$200 for 1 gram of heroin. The current street price of opium is estimated at U.S. \$15 per gram. This indicates a relatively constant price for heroin over the past two years and a steadily decreasing price for opium.

Demand Reduction. Taking the average of the number of registered drug addicts reported by independent and official sources would indicate that there were at least 150,000 drug users in Georgia during 2003. The increase in the number of drug addicts and consumption in comparison with last year is mainly caused by the import and legal sale of poppy seeds-used in baking. The price for 1 kilogram of poppy seed was 2 lari (equivalent of 1 dollar) and according to government sources 1 kilogram is enough for four people to become intoxicated. The Ministry of Internal Affairs claims school children are becoming drug addicts and the poppy seed was considered the most popular and easily obtainable drug in 2003. The newly appointed Minister banned the sale and import of the seeds and symbolically destroyed 1 ton of confiscated seeds in front of the MOIA Headquarters.

IV. U S. Policy Initiatives and Programs.

Bilateral Cooperation. In 2003, USG continued timely and direct assistance on criminal justice issues to the Government of Georgia as well as the legal and law enforcement community in the areas of procuracy (State's Attorney) reform, corruption, money laundering, criminal procedure, forensics, and human trafficking.

The Road Ahead. The best way to assist Georgia's law enforcement efforts is focused training and technical assistance from the U.S. and the international community on a few high-priority, achievable objectives. Any assistance to Georgian law enforcement, including counter-narcotics, must include a provision for anti-corruption reform. A Georgian specialist in the field of narcotics believes that establishment of a DEA analogue in Georgia will help tremendously in decreasing the level of illegal drug use and trafficking.